

**Island Beach\***

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Some comments may be of interest to readers in view of the Resolution about Island Beach appearing in this issue. Located in Ocean County, New Jersey, within the so-called Torrey Range, Island Beach is a sand bar nine miles long. It is less than half a mile across except for two places where its width approaches three quarters of a mile. It is separated two and one half to four and one half miles from the mainland by Barnegat Bay. At the present time it is not an island but a peninsula joining the mainland at Point Pleasant, several miles to the north. The part of the peninsula above Island Beach has been developed to varying degrees as summer resort areas, the adjacent one being Seaside Park. Barnegat inlet forms the southern boundary. One very old map shows an inlet just north of Island Beach. This has been closed certainly well over a century.

Politically, Island Beach is a borough, though almost unpopulated. Originally it was a part of three townships, though always as a small, disconnected remnant across the bay. This made fire protection and policing almost non-existent. Vandalism and the fire hazard discouraged owners and retarded real estate development. When the Barnegat Bay and Beach Company acquired almost exclusive ownership some years ago they petitioned the Legislature to make it a borough for its own protection. This was done. The area has since been held as a real estate investment. The only means of access, other than boat, is from Seaside Park via a service road which extended half the length of the Borough until completed by the army as a defense measure.

With the successful development of a state park program, the development of such a park at the seashore was an obvious suggestion. The Division of Forests and Parks of the State Department of Conservation and Development was interested. A recommendation for such use of the land was made later by the State Planning Board.

In the spring of 1940 legislation was introduced to disincorporate the Borough and return the land to the three townships. Faced with the possibility of having its property without adequate protection, the Barnegat Bay and Beach Company advertised that should the legislation be enacted the

\* See the resolution, adopted by the Club, March 21, 1945, on p. 60, and letters in reply, pp. 62, 63.

area would be laid out in "trailer lots" and placed on the market. The legislation was not enacted but the eyes of people with diverse interests in Island Beach had been opened to the possibilities, and the possibilities were not pleasant. Regaining a clear title to the area after its subdivision and sale to thousands of small owners would be neither easy nor cheap.

In November of 1940 a meeting was called by Governor Moore. Representatives of State departments, local governments, civic groups, societies, and individuals were invited to discuss the possible future of the area. A member of the National Park Service gave general information on the establishment and administration of reservations under their jurisdiction. Many possibilities were presented. It was decided to appoint a committee to approach members of the legislature for their views and for information on the probability of purchase and development of the area by the State. The group was reassembled on August 30, 1941 and the committee reported that responsible members of the legislature saw no prospects of the State being able to finance a proposition of this size. There was general agreement among the many groups represented that the greatest hope of saving this area from commercialization lay in getting it under the administration of the National Park Service.

Came the war. This exposed and almost uninhabited area was immediately placed under constant surveillance. It has remained under army control and more or less closed to civilians. In 1942 when the army's projection of the roadway to the end of the bar was decided upon, the Chief of Engineers was advised of the unique and important natural history embodied in the area.

During the past two years there has been a considerable reorganization of the state government in New Jersey. In the course of this a Department of Economic Development has been set up. One of its acts has been a survey of projects of public works that might be undertaken should it become desirable for the State to supplement business and industry in the maintenance of employment levels. Among the recommendations to the Governor was that of acquiring Island Beach for development as a state park and public playground. One of our members, Dr. George H. Shull, addressed an open letter to the Governor opposing this recommendation in view of the importance of maintaining the status quo in this last example of such an area. There has been some exchange of ideas on the philosophy of public beach and playground to be used by a great many as compared with the preservation of a natural area to be used by relatively few. No one has objected to the acquisition and development of some equally or more desirable site for public use but there is no other area suitable for preservation as a natural seashore area in New Jersey, and quite possibly none the equal of Island Beach north of Cape Hatteras.

Dr. Shull, the writer, and others have been taking advanced classes to Island Beach for study over a period of years. Many other interested groups have been conducted over the area. The Torrey Botanical Club selected this and the pine barrens for its 75th Anniversary foray as the two most unique and important areas within its range. If we should preserve representative pieces of natural vegetation as museum pieces for posterity, here is what Island Beach has to offer: 1, Beach vegetation for nine miles on the open ocean and an equal distance on the bay; 2, Dune vegetation in all stages of its dynamics; 3, Dune thickets; 4, Dune hollows; 5, Fresh marsh; 6, Salt marsh; 7, Acres of *Hudsonia* heath; 8, Coastal plain forest; 9, Southern white cedar swamp; and 10, Bog.

The last three of these plant communities are of particular interest in their resemblance, on a miniature scale, to the similar communities constituting the well known pine barrens of inland southern New Jersey. May it be that we are seeing here the floristics that once occurred on that area?

In view of the turbulent history of Island Beach, its present unified ownership, and the relatively moderate disturbance that has thus far occurred, it seems unlikely that there will be a more opportune and desirable time of transferring it to the status of a natural history preserve, if it is deemed worthy of preservation. The National Park Service remains interested and seems the most desirable administrative agency. The initiative must be taken by the State, an enabling act must be passed by the Congress, and, perhaps most difficult of all, the land must be purchased.

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